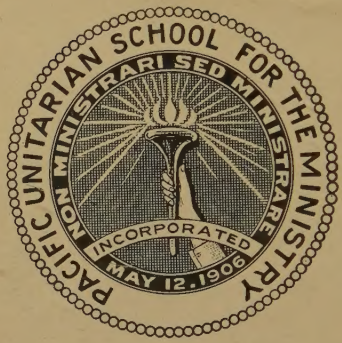
Better Not.

By J. H. Vincent, L.L.D.

BV
4597
V47
1892
GTU
Storage



BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

THE GIFT OF

PROFESSOR FRANCIS
GREENWOOD PEABODY

BETTER NOT

A DISCUSSION OF CERTAIN SOCIAL CUSTOMS

BY

J. H. VINCENT

Property of
CBSK
Please return to
Graduate Theological
Union Library

New York
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LONDON AND TORONTO
1892

BV
4597
V47
1892

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1888, by
FUNK & WAGNALLS,
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington, D. C.

V 743

BETTER NOT.

BY J. H. VINCENT.

I.

THERE are certain customs, long established and almost universal in their observance in what is known as "Society," which are strongly opposed by a respectable part of Society, but which are by an overwhelming majority sustained and defended. To some frank and courteously expressed thoughts on these customs the author invites the kind and impartial attention of the reader.

To put the matter squarely at the outset we shall at once name the customs we are compelled in our discussion to condemn. They are the customs of social wine-drinking, card-

9132

playing, theatre-going, and dancing. Old topics? Yes, fair young reader, and yet very new; new as the young life that enters the parlors of to-day to enjoy and to give tone and character to Society, or to be moulded and ruled by Society. No class of topics has been more thoroughly discussed, and none requires more faithful, radical, and judicious treatment.

II.

We begin with wine-drinking, and plunge at once into the subject by saying, "Better not" touch wine. All wine is not the same wine, to be sure, but we insist that it is better to let wine—all wine—alone. We know that people differ in opinion on this subject. Even good people have differed. In America, many years ago, wine and other liquors were kept on the sideboards of our best people. Clergymen drank wine at parties and in private, after preaching and before it, at weddings and at funerals. They saw no harm in it. In England and Scotland, in France and Germany to-day, you will find wine on the tables of many Christian men and in the vestries of many churches. But in the face of this example, and in view of every consideration, we say emphatically to young people—and to

old people, for that matter—better not drink wine at all—of any kind—anywhere.

People who defend a wise and cautious use of wine tell you that Christ made wine at a feast; that He never came out in His bold way against wine-drinking as He did against things that He regarded as sinful; that in Scripture times wine was used socially and at great feasts; that good wine is employed in Scripture as the symbol of the best things in the kingdom of grace. These people oppose intemperance but not temperance in the use of wine. But we are bound to say, "Better not" drink wine at all. We think, moreover, that the voice of Scripture as it sounds in these days is wholly against the use of wine. And it is proper to say that on both sides of the sea a more careful examination of the question by Christian people brings them every year nearer together on the subject.

The friends of the wine-glass ask you to point out the harm that there is in the use of a little wine in a social way, now and then, by

people who have wills of their own. They do not think it well, of course, to carry that practice too far so as to become enslaved. But for their lives they cannot see how just a little good wine in a wine-glass can do anybody any harm. They detest fanaticism. They say that they know good people who use wine. They know old and healthy people who have used it for many years. They have taken it themselves in fashionable ways. And they think, and cannot help thinking, that you are a little narrow and one-sided and weak-minded in your radical views on the subject. Under the pressure of all this glib talk, with a tinge of exquisite sarcasm in it (the full effect of which you feel), it is hard for you to take up your now apparently witless arguments against the habit. Their answers are ready, and with them a ringing laugh at your expense, and a lordly sneer whenever you attempt a defence of your total abstinence position.

Of course these people who sip wine at will, "as all gentlemen do," and with "perfect

self-control, as all gentlemen have"—these good people do not drink other liquors. They believe in drawing a line somewhere. They think that whiskey, brandy, and rum are rather vulgar, and even dangerous, but for them wine is harmless—perfectly so. And then there is "Society." Its claims and regulations are not to be forgotten. "Best society" uses wine. You will find the glasses ringing and the wine sparkling in all elaborate entertainments given by the "noble and the rich." And if you expect to go into Society at all you *must* get over your silly scruples about total abstinence. You need not drink whiskey in order to stand well in Society. You need not drink wine to excess, but you are very foolish, if you care for social recognition and respect, to carry "your peculiar views" so far. Better not shut yourself out of best society because of your scrupulosity about such a trifle. Why not yield a little, and thus allow yourself to be put where you can do society good? Your total abstinence keeps you

from influencing for good the young people who need your help. They drink to excess; but if you will go with them and sip a little—only a little—you may thus use your influence in favor of temperance. You can show them how to stop when they have enough. Plausible argument! But we are still emphatic in repeating our counsel: "Better not" touch wine!

Our society advisers go on to say: How much better to drink a little with your children at home than by your total abstinence to disgust them with over-strictness, prejudice them against true temperance, against you, and against the Church, which gives you your close and narrow and anti-society notions. Accordingly, you put the wine-glass on your own table to train your children against excess, and prejudice them against drunkenness, and keep them at home.

After all, when the boy thus gets an appetite for drink from his father and mother, and afterward becomes a slave to liquor and curses

the day he touched the first glass, and lies down to die a drunkard's death, one cannot help the feeling that it would have been better not to forge the first link of the strong chain that thus binds body and soul for the long years of life, and for the longer eternity.

It is not always easy to prove that the simple act of sipping the glass of wine in conformity to social custom is *per se* a sin, and if it be not a sin, as other single acts can easily be proven to be, why are we so strenuous? Give liberty! Let people do as they please. Do not be so bigoted. Do not be narrow. Let your children grow up in a larger world than that in which you were trained. This is the nineteenth century. Avoid dogmatism.

Now all this sounds very well. If the question were between two or ten or fifty sips, at as many feasts, we might the more easily settle it; but the acts are not thus disconnected and independent. We cannot deal with an occasional indulgence as an act separate and apart.

The "wine-cup" is an institution. It is a mighty institution of manifold adaptations, with great financial energies to sustain it, with endless woes following its dominion, with forces of hell back of it. That harmless little elf that you toy with at a dinner-table, sparkling, laughing, alluring, is one of a mighty army. He belongs to the "world," not the WORLD that God made, full of light, sublimity, beauty, love, and delight, but the "world" that man makes under the spell of sin and selfishness; the "world" of appetite, and sensuality, and selfishness; the "world" that Christ refused to buy by a compromise; the "world" that Christ warned His people against; the "world" that is under the rule of the prince of darkness. You cannot make up with this single member of the advance guard, the picket-line, harmless as he may be, perfect as your command over him may be—you cannot fellowship him without giving increased power to the kingdom he belongs to and represents.

III.

It is the institution, not the single glass, we are most afraid of. It is the institution you build up when you take a single glass that makes us warn you with our faithful : "Better not" touch it. But, you say, we know good people who handle the elf so completely that he never seems to do them any harm. Yonder is a man of eighty. He says : "I have lived and played with the jolly little fellow this seventy years. He never got into *my* brain. He is my toy, my slave. A man is a fool who is befuddled by such an imp." By the side of the octogenarian stands a minister of the Gospel who takes his wine. The society of which he has always been a member has taken wine. He has a strong will, a particularly vigorous system, and nerves under complete control ; and therefore he plays with

the jolly little demon, and is unharmed. "There is," he says, "no 'Thus saith the Lord' against the use of good wine (our Lord made good wine at a feast once);" and so the octogenarian and middle-aged clergyman drink, wisely, with self-control, as gentlemen in Society, and are standing proofs that wine-drinking is not invariably a damage, nor necessarily a sin, and that only weak and misguided people insist upon total abstinence.

While this conversation goes on we watch the two elves in the hands of the two strong advocates of temperance—of temperance in the use of wine. How the little demons wink at each other, and at the other ten elves at the same table! The position of the two is the strength of the ten. Although the two are not drained nearly as often as the ten, the frequent draining of the ten is because of the cautious handling of the two. There, across the table, is a man whose life-struggle has been, or ought to have been, against appetite. His will is weak. His nerves are sensitive.

The slightest touch of alcohol in his stomach sends the fire to his brain. He is weak, but does not know it. He is sensitive, but does not fear. He thinks that perhaps he ought not to take any wine. He has partial views against it. But old Mr. —— and Rev. Dr. —— both drink, and are well-preserved. If they can indulge with impunity, he can. Why not? He drinks. He feels good. He drinks again. He is very strong now. He *and* old Mr. —— and Rev. Dr. —— are three men of much will, and force, and character. Grand trio!

Then the three elves wink and grin, and the puff of smoke over each glass shows that hell is glad, for in the strength of the two is the doom of the third. But the remaining nine wine-drinkers at that feast are in one way or another, to a greater or less degree, brought under the same spell, and all the imps at that table of twelve rejoice because of the triumph of the institution that all belong to and represent. But the proudest of the twelve little

imps are the two in the conservative and steady hands of old Mr. —— and Rev. Dr. ——. Their conservatism gives weight to their example, and ten souls are bound in chains because of two who could safely tamper with the cunning tyrant—safely for themselves, but alas for the end of it all when the price of blood is demanded !

At that table of death was a thirteenth, who turned the glass at his place upside down, and ordered the water from the brook as his beverage. "I could, perhaps, drink it with safety," he said, "but not with safety to my fellows; and if drinking wine make my brother to offend, I will drink no wine while the world stands." Then the twelve imps frowned and scolded because of him and his glass of cold water; but out of the water rose a crown as of diamonds, that shone in the sight of angels as it rested on his brow, and a voice said: "Blessed is he who for the good of men denies himself, and who cannot be beguiled by the fairest and most plausible little

elf of self-indulgence in which he sees the latent power of a great and baleful institution." Whatever our young readers may think about the voice of Scripture on the subject of wine-drinking, and about the question of sin, *per se*, we think it right and wise to say, "Better not" give it place or patronage or influence. For every reason "better not" touch wine.

IV.

Because of all this you say, that we are opposed to "pleasure," and to "a good time" for young people. You call us an old monk, who hates the world and would clothe it in sackcloth and forbid all gratification of appetite, who would break up society if he could, and turn life into a funeral procession. Well, then, let us say that we are not opposed to "pleasure," unless a particular form of pleasure be a part and parcel of a great institution, an army of unrighteousness, the power of whose tread imperils social security and domestic peace and individual well-being. We are not opposed to "young people having a good time" unless their good time in youth saps the energies of life and despoils them of an equally good time when they grow old. We are not an old monk, and take

no interest in sackcloth even as a means of grace.

We believe in the legitimate gratification of normal appetites, but we certainly would break up a Society which devises unwholesome laws, ridicules the grace of self-denial, dogmatizes about liberty, and yet refuses to recognize as its members those who take the liberty to differ from its dogmas and who refuse to obey its tyrannical enactments.

It is to save the world from being a cemetery and life a funeral procession that we say with emphasis to young people, "Better not" drink wine at all. And "better not" do several other things simply because Society demands that you do them. Be on the look out, in all simple and apparently harmless things in Society, for the force back of and within them, and look out also for the institutions of which they are a part.

We are filled with anxiety when we see the influence of worldly society in the matter of wine-drinking. A gentleman in Philadelphia

said to us some months ago: "I train my children to drink wine at home, because I desire them to be accustomed to the regulations of Society when they are required to meet people of refinement at state dinners and on great social occasions. If I train them while they are young to self-control in the matter of wine-drinking, they will be able to control themselves when they face temptation in the world." The religious standing of the gentleman in question increased our surprise at this bold and irrational theory, and at his cowardly surrender to the clamors of worldly society. It is for this reason that we make war upon worldly society so far as it demands from the followers of Jesus Christ conformity to its conventional usages.

The danger of the Church to-day is from "Society." The savage beasts of the arena may not be ready to leap from their dens upon loyal followers of Jesus Christ, who would meet death rather than deny their Master. But the scorn, the hiss, the social "cut," are

the means sometimes now employed by the same tempting and malicious spirit of the world to compel Christians to surrender their principles and convictions at the demand of the prince of the power of the air. Let us stand by our principles. Let us follow conscience, and not fashion ; Christ, and not the world.

V.

Let us approach with caution the question of social amusements. We seek the truth concerning them. We want to say our say after a careful examination of the whole ground. It is easy to cut the knot. It is easy to grow red in the face, to talk in loud tones, to gesticulate wildly, and to denounce fiercely. It is easy to say, "Your Church has so ordered or so decided." But the question will again and again come up in the minds of rational people, "Why does he get so angry? Is the lack of reason and argument to be concealed by intensity and fury?" Or the young man or woman will ask "what right the Church has to impose a condition of membership which cannot be sustained either by a 'Thus saith the Lord,' or by some fundamental principle of Christian ethics." We think we do well

to be calm and careful in considering the subject.

Here are some questions which the right-minded man will ask and by the answer to which he may judge himself, as he is sure to be judged by others who do not see the hidden things of the heart, as well as by HIM to whose all-searching eye the deepest recesses of the heart lie open.

First, Concerning this act of indulgence to which I incline, and which is approved by fashion, is there a particular divine command by which I may promptly determine its moral quality? Can I find words on the subject in the Book?

Second, If not, is this indulgence directly or indirectly connected with any organized or established institution or custom in Society, which institution or custom, on the whole, tends to evil?

Third, If one commit himself to its influence by specific acts, or by habit, does he thereby run a risk from evils almost insepa-

rable from the institution or custom? Are there such recognized evils? Is there such a risk?

Fourth, Will the omission of the particular act or habit, and the positive repudiation of the institution or custom, imperil his character or impair his influence for good?

Fifth, Is the world of life or experience into which the institution or custom leads, on the whole, harmful or helpful to the man who desires to live wisely, and with an eye to eternal well-being? All social and business circles have a certain atmosphere. Now, what is the spiritual influence of the social atmosphere in which the custom or institution under consideration places those who enter to enjoy it?

Sixth, How do religious and active Christians, who have examined the institution or custom in the very latest and strongest lights, stand in reference to it? Their judgment is not final. They do not speak by authority; but just as physicians have opinions on the tendency of certain habits, the influence of

certain climates, the effects of certain diet, which opinions acquire value from their familiarity with the human body, so should the opinions of spiritually-minded Christians weigh in respect to such social gratification.

Placed as we are in a world fond of the flesh and slow to follow the Spirit; with a necessity put upon us from which we have no escape except by struggle or surrender; with subjection to the power of example, popular opinion, habit, and invisible spiritual influence, it becomes every son of man to study well the situation, to avoid all complications and associations by which the fleshly forces will be increased and temptations multiplied and made more dangerous. It becomes him to put himself, by firm resolve and wise direction, into secure places, where the social atmospheres are pure, the associations helpful, and where his personal influence will be exerted for good and only for good. He must not sacrifice his manhood, his personal independence, or his self-respect, but he must en-

sphere his strongest manhood where it will find satisfying supplies of thought, purest and highest motives, increase of dignity and nobility, and where it will tend to ennoble, strengthen, and bless all who come within its reach.

Apply these principles to the social custom of wine-drinking, and it seems as clear as noonday that the broad, sympathetic, large-minded Christian must be a total abstainer. Tested by those standards, social wine-drinking is unchristian. Now, this is apparently a severe thing to say. Placed as we have often been, in England and on the Continent, where the only abstainers from wine were in our own immediate party of American tourists, we feel how severe a thing it is to write what we have just written. But does not truth require it?

VI.

THERE are evils in our social state besides wine and wine-drinking. There are other things concerning which we have no specific "Thus saith the Lord," and in reference to which the philosophy and spirit of Scripture are to be considered. There are other questions in the decision of which we are to examine the relations of an act to an institution or custom, and the relations of that institution or custom to society. We are to ask, not "Does the Bible positively forbid it?" not "Where is the harm in the thing itself?" but

Does the institution and custom, on the whole, tend to evil?

Are there risks in it requiring especial care?

Will the neglect of the institution imperil character?

Is it, on the whole, harmful or helpful to the soul who gives himself to it?

How do intelligent, religious, and active Christians, who have examined the institution or custom in the very strongest and latest lights, stand toward it?

There are three such institutions (making, with the wine-cup, four) to which our attention as educators of the young and as reformers of society is called. In this discussion we have no bitterness. We shall not deal in denunciation. We will not dogmatize. We write for the benefit of young people by the hundred thousand who want to know why ministers and Church people of the more fervent and consistent sort are so strongly set against these things; why Church conventions, conferences, classes, synods, etc., pass such strong resolutions against them; why they are so often specified as things forbidden in books of Church order and discipline; why bishops, Protestant and Roman Catholic, and the vast majority of ministers, officially issue

warnings and appeals in reference to them; why so many refined ladies of the best society are opposed to them; why sermons are preached, and tracts and books printed against them; why these things are prohibited and by common consent given up in time of Lent by the Churches that put stress on "times and seasons;" in times of revival by the Churches that hold revivals; and all the year round by Churches that believe that what might be conducive to worldliness for forty days in the spring is equally harmful to spiritual life on any and all of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. These are the questions we want to answer. And they are serious questions. Wise, scholarly, reverent, godly men and women consider them as worthy of serious consideration.

The sneer on a pretty face in a lovely parlor may have present power to intimidate and tempt and influence the young soul that loves the truth, and that seeks the best things; and the young man or maiden sneered at might

find it hard to make a sneer relax before a forcible argument, especially where the majority of young people in social bonds combined, uphold each other, and seem to care very little for "eternity," or "principle," or "tendencies," or the relations of moments of personal enjoyment to the great "institutions," or any of the great principles which belong to the unseen world of character and conduct.

The invisible in which a true life dwells by faith, is not only a remote and divine and celestial existence, but a present dominion of laws and principles, the recognition of which demands faith of the most stalwart and heroic kind. A touch of scorn, a sneer, a giddy laugh—all of these fail to answer the questions that come up in convention and conference, in episcopal and pastoral letters—the questions that saints pray over and sages discuss and truly broad men want to be wise about, and in answer to which, with remarkable unanimity, they say: "Better not."

Over against the sneer of the stripling we put the serious counsel of the sage : " Better not." And we desire candidly and thoughtfully to weigh the whole subject and bring to bear upon it the results of personal observation, and of the deliberations and experiences of those who have a right to be heard on all subjects which relate to Christian character and conduct.

VII.

THERE are several questions which a wise man will ask concerning the so-called "uncertain things" of Christian life. For in these things are often found the severest and surest tests of character. It is in uncertain laws of expediency and propriety that the most helpful standards for judgment are to be found. One may obey where he is simply afraid to disobey, and this is poor obedience; better than disobedience, to be sure, but it is a weak quality of obedience. He who is eager to do right, and who weighs well every situation in which a specific command is lacking, is likely to train his soul to desire the right, to discover the right, and to embrace and defend the right.

Christian people must solve many problems relating to important lines of action on which the Holy Spirit has not given circumstantial

and authoritative direction in the Scriptures. The Bible deals with principles. It lays down general laws and leaves us to the exercise of our own judgment in the application of them. This exercise is most useful. It trains us to discrimination. It cultivates delicacy of spiritual perception. It refines character.

The whole question of allowable recreation belongs to this department of spiritual criticism ; which is of the highest class of criticism, and involves the very noblest service to which the critical faculties can be put. We do not say that more important questions are not submitted to this tribunal, but we do assert that there is no tribunal to which conduct can be submitted which is more worthy of appreciation and honor. It avails nothing that you ridicule those who ask the question, " Are the so-called amusements of society allowable among Christians ?" Nor is it rational to denounce the question as frivolous and useless. It is a question born of intelligent desire to mould character according to divine ideals.

We once studied some of the delicate tracery on the frieze of the old cloisters near the "Tower of Charlemagne," in the French city of Tours. The tendrils of a vine are still to be traced in the solid stone, the work of sculptors who wrought toward an ideal perfection. That work was done centuries ago. The fine lines remain to-day—tributes to the finer taste of the artists. Is he less worthy of approval who seeks the power to fashion character according to highest and holiest thought; to cultivate spiritual sense and susceptibility; and, above all, to foster the love that sacrifices for the well-being of others?

You do not speak lightly of those who ask practical questions concerning the physical life: What will prolong it, what put it at its best for endurance and for performance, what weaken or dwarf it, or what tend to promote disease and death. You do not find fault with those who ask questions about the intellectual life: What will strengthen and what weaken it, what will render it capable of prompt action

in all of its faculties, and what interfere with its even balance. You do not object to the recipes and rules and queries which are started in Society, or with a view to effect in Society : recipes for the complexion, rules for deportment, and queries which settle questions of etiquette.

Why, then, this sensitiveness about the minutiæ of character and of spiritual culture ? If the charm of a graceful bow and carriage in the parlor be so highly esteemed, made up as it is of attention to very trifling elements, why should they be condemned who ask how far a process is to be justified, or how far it ought to be modified, which, though it gives a certain exterior ease and grace, may weaken, if not ruin, more important qualities of the soul ? Certainly the question is worthy of most serious consideration, and ought to be examined carefully, candidly, and in the light of all its bearings on life and on the character which concern the life eternal.

VIII.

We do not represent any theory of Christian conduct which condemns recreation. We avow our faith in recreation. We do not now discuss the relation of such physical exercises as are known as "croquet" and "lawn tennis" to the question before us. Out-door games which require action and promote cheerfulness are not classified with the worldly indulgences we are about summoning to the test of certain Christian principles. We have to ask concerning the wine-glass, the theatre, the dance, and the card-table a practical and radical question.

And we ask our readers to take note at the outset that the question is not whether "young people shall have a good time in this world," nor as to whether busy people shall have recreation. It is not whether a glass of wine or

a simple dance is, *per se*, a sin. It is not what the Church is to do to keep her young people satisfied with her doctrines while they are not hindered by her restrictions. Nor is it as to the best way for worldly parents to pack into the lives of their children all the fun and jollity possible. But here is the first question. Ponder it well :

What policy in reference to the dance, the theatre, the card-table, and the wine-glass shall parents adopt—parents who are anxious to act with the highest wisdom in the training of their children, and to promote in them strength and nobility of character, habitual self-denial, and earnest effort for the good of others ?

We begin with parents, for they first of all meet the question and are compelled to evade or examine it. They meet it before the Church does. They may, as some parents do, ignore it or laugh at it, or "leave the children to decide for themselves." Or they may consider their responsibility in a devout and teach-

able state of mind, decide on which side their influence must be given, and then with faithfulness and steadiness and affectionate tenderness give it on that side. The problem becomes weighted with great significance, and there can be no trifling reference to it when this significance is appreciated. What shall father and mother say and do when this question comes up?

There is one other question which belongs with the one just propounded. And here it is:

What policy in reference to the dance, the theatre, the card-table, and the wine-glass shall young people adopt—young people who are anxious to act with the highest wisdom, respect, and affection toward their parents, and who are ambitious to attain strength of character and to set the safest and best example to their friends and companions in society?

It should be understood, to begin with, that this is not a subject which can be settled by parental or ecclesiastical authority. Home and

the Church can do a great deal, but the young people must decide the question for themselves after all. Authority reaches up to the wall that Nature and Civil Law build around the young man's life. There comes a day when maturity is attained and the wall falls. The "Thou shalt" is a dead letter, save as love and filial respect choose to keep it in force. This aspect of the subject needs to be kept in mind, and we recognize it in the line of argument we propose to follow in this discussion.

We appeal to young men and young women who aim at self-culture and the attainment of the highest manhood and fairest womanhood. Under the light of a self-imposed ideal what should you do? We acknowledge, for we feel keenly, the difficulties in the way. You do not see a specific command or prohibition in the Holy Scriptures touching these questions —or at least concerning all of them. There is a difference of opinion among excellent Christian people. Social customs are so hard to fight against. The demands of Fashion are

relentless. The ministers themselves are often silent in the pulpit, although in private they condemn indulgence in the four "worldly pleasures" specified. Art is so attractive. The arguments in favor of indulgence are so plausible. "Puritanic severity" is so narrow and so despicable. How hard it is to make war upon or to resist institutions at once popular and delightful! After all, true Wisdom may whisper to parents as they ask whether they shall encourage their children to indulge or not—"Better not." And from young people of the highest type, who stand humble and devout students at the shrine of the same divine Wisdom, we hear the echo "Better not."

IX.

We do not discuss the question as to whether or not the mere act of playing a game of cards is sinful. The act and the question lose their simplicity in the relations of the game to what may be called an institution—world-wide, international, very ancient, and exceedingly fascinating. It has votaries and victims and defenders everywhere. It belongs to Society and is an established institution of Society.

When young people go out into the world the pack of cards greets them. Some can play and some cannot. Those who cannot are expected to learn. They are laughed at if they don't. So in most cases they learn, for they don't like to be laughed at; and it is hard to find an argument that will weigh much with the three card-players who are trying to make up the requisite four for a given game. There

is no "Thus saith the Lord" on the subject. Perhaps that would not weigh much, either, in this particular case. But as they see the case it is a very simple thing—this playing with a few painted cards.

It is not, it cannot be, *per se*, wicked. It is a custom "as old as the hills." Most of the "best families" play. A few ministers justify it. More of them "see no special harm in it." A large number wink at it and "let it go." They don't want to be disliked by the young folks, or pronounced "old fogies." After all, "young folks will be young folks." And so it happens that the young people whose parents feel keenly on the subject (from the memory of a ruined brother, a tempted father, a wretched wife) are exposed to the temptation.

If people go into Society, how can they help meeting the temptation? Society everywhere plays cards—and that, we concede, with the acquiescence of some respectable people in the Church, the approval of many nice people out

of the Church, and the emphatic endorsement of weak people and wicked people everywhere to whom the Church is nothing but a body of hypocrites, Pharisees, or fanatics. The young fellow with the dews of mother's love upon him is swept in by Society, possibly passes through unharmed, or possibly, as in thousands of cases, is caught in the rapids, hurled over the falls, and swept into the awful gulf below. But then Society laughs at the "fool," and says that "greenhorns and piously reared fellows are always in danger." The institution remains. In private parlor, in hotel drawing-room, in shop, in bedroom, in gilded saloon, in club-room, in palace-car, on ocean steamer, in gorgeous gambling hell, in military and in mining camps, by day and by night, in summer and in winter, year in and year out, in every land, on every shore, the great institution carries on its work. How innocent-looking are these little bits of stiff paper! They are indeed, and yet they represent a variety of games which are unified in the well-known

"card-table," which is supported by avarice, by infatuation, and by fashion. First fashion in society; then fascination worse than that of the serpent's eye; then furious fever that neither love nor reason nor conscience can allay.

Shall Christians countenance the card-table? We do not discuss the subject from the standpoint of the world, nor in the interest of worldly people. It belongs to them to have "a good time," as they estimate enjoyment, and not to live for others at the expense of their own pleasure.

But as to Christian policy—this is the question. We cannot easily separate the individual act from the institution itself. The one is a a part of the other. Take that fashionable form of card-playing known as "progressive euchre." What is it but gambling? What difference in principle between the forfeits of the one and the prizes of the other? The fact is, that the path to the innermost hell of gambling is through the clover-bloom of fashionable card-playing. The victims in the gam-

bling dens to-day were once votaries in the parlors of fashion, where no (or only nominal) stakes were set up and where people were bent on nothing but "fun," or "to pass the time," or "to be in the style." Tested by the questions we have already proposed for our guidance, what shall be the young Christian's policy? And what counsels shall parents and people in responsible positions give on the subject? Does any one run risks from possible evils connected with card-playing? Will the refusal to indulge in it impair one's character or influence? Will he lose anything by such refusal? Will he forfeit spiritual discernment or the confidence of good men? And again, is the world into which it leads on the whole harmful? And how do spiritually-minded people stand toward it? What advice do they give? There is one answer to all these questions as they combine in the one question, Shall young Christians approve of and patronize the card-table in any of its forms? That answer is, BETTER NOT.

The card-table has no good and much evil. In its most innocent forms it is only the picket-line of a great and an evil army. It is like the wine-cup. There is no argument against the one that does not hold against the other. And but for the love of Fashion, the fear of Society, and the lack of taste for intellectual and spiritual occupations, no Christian would think of patronizing or defending the card-table.

We reinforce our counsels in regard to this social indulgence by four quotations which will have weight with thoughtful young people. The first is from John Locke :

> "As to cards and dice, I think the safest and best way is never to learn to play upon them, and be so incapacitated for those dangerous temptations and encroaching wasters of time."

To this let us add the testimony of Addison :

> "I think it very wonderful to see persons of the best sense passing away a dozen hours together in shuffling and dividing a

pack of cards, with no other conversation but what is made up of a few game phrases, and no other ideas but those of black or red spots ranged together in different figures. Would not a man laugh to hear any one of this species complaining that life is short?"

Let us hear what Dr. J. G. Holland says on the subject:

"I have all my days had a card-playing community open to my observation, and I am yet to be made to believe that that which is the universal resort of the starved in soul and intellect, which has never in any way linked to itself tender, elevating, or beautiful associations—the tendency of that which is to unduly absorb the attention from more weighty matters—can recommend itself to the favor of Christ's disciples. The presence of culture and genius may embellish, but it can never dignify it. I have at this moment ringing in my ears the dying injunction of my father's early friend, 'Keep

your son from cards. Over them I have murdered time and lost heaven.' "

And from the Philadelphia *Ledger* the following forcible putting of the case is taken : "There are so many ways in which girls can be amusing, entertaining, and useful to themselves and to others that it seems a great pity that any of them should resort to the common vices of coarse men. That they do so in the evening entertainments of private and elegant homes and at the most fashionable summer resorts appears to be beyond question. And that the results will appear in unlooked-for demoralizations in the future of what is called good society may be set down as among the certainties of natural law. Young ladies may not be expressly susceptible to such prosy moral arguments, but they should not forget that the young men who gamble with them, and who appear to enjoy the fun, lose their respect for young ladies in the exact measure that the latter cease to be governed by fine

womanly feelings and standards of character. Men may laugh at the shrewdness of a girl in a game of cards for stakes, but she is not the girl they will trust or honor or that they care to marry. That is an argument to the quick, and may find its way home. The man who marries a gambling girl is already an incipient suitor in a divorce court."

X.

Shall Christians patronize the theatre? Our answer, always promptly given, is in two words: "Better not." Does the Bible contain positive prohibitions on the subject? Who will find the passage? But—"Better not" sustain the theatre. Is not the theatre a product of and a response to the "dramatic instinct" in man? It may be all that and even then be all wrong. Are not rum and whiskey a similar response to and provision for inborn appetites?

The whole question depends upon the legitimate uses of the dramatic taste and the dramatic power. What may be wholesome in rhetorical and oratorical expression may with spectacular accompaniments produce overwrought imaginations and do damage to both the intellectual and moral elements in man.

The necessary pretence and "put on" of the stage may be as injurious to the hearers and eye-witnesses as to the actors, who give themselves up to the unreal life which almost unavoidably fosters falsity. The spiritual nature that needs culture by the contemplation of the unseen may be so dazzled as to be benumbed and deadened by the vividness, boldness, and splendor of the spectacular display. There are lights too brilliant for one to look at, if he would keep his eyes adjusted to delicate service.

Now there may be a reason against the theatre as a resort for saints and for those who want to be both saintly and wise, as deep and unanswerable as is man's nature delicate and as are the laws of spiritual culture real and unchangeable. The argument from "dramatic instinct" is of little weight with thoughtful men, for they know that the capacity itself may find abundant exercise in other and worthier fields without employing the dangerous devices of the stage. Indeed, there seems to be an irreconcilable antagonism between spirit-

ual sensitiveness and dramatic entertainments. As a faithful pastor says : " A high spiritual tone pervading the community would empty many of the seats in our theatres, proving that there is an utter lack of harmony between right feeling toward God and a taste for ordinary exhibitions of the stage."

But what of the institution itself? The theatre has made a history. Its quality and its tendency and its fruits are known the world over. It was in the days of its glory in Greece and Rome a corrupter of the people. So said the sages then. So say the historians now. Nor is the theatre any better to-day. Dr. Buckley gives the following testimony : " Being aware of the fact that the drama, like everything else which caters to the taste, has its fashions—rising and falling and undergoing various changes—now improving and then degenerating, I have thought it desirable to institute a careful inquiry into the plays which have been performed in the principal theatres of New York during the past three years.

Accordingly I procured the copies used by the performers in preparing for their parts, and took pains to ascertain wherein, in actual use, the actors diverged from the printed copy. They number over sixty, and, with the exception of a few unpublished plays, include all that have been produced in the prominent theatres of New York during the three years now about closing. . . . It is a singular fact, that, with three or four exceptions, those dramatic compositions, among the sixty or more under discussion, which are morally unobjectionable are of a comparatively low order of literary execution. But if language and sentiments which would not be tolerated among respectable people, and would excite indignation if addressed to the most uncultivated and coarse servant girl, not openly vicious, by an ordinary young man, and profaneness which would brand him who uttered it as irreligious are improper amusements for the young and for Christians of every age, then at least fifty of these plays are to be condemned."

Dr. Theodore Cuyler, an observer of men and of Society and an experienced pastor in Brooklyn for many years, says : " The American theatre is a concrete institution, to be judged as a totality. It is responsible for what it tolerates and shelters. We, therefore, hold it responsible for whatever of sensual impurity and whatever of irreligion, as well as for whatever of occasional and sporadic benefit, there may be bound up in its organic life. Instead of helping Christ's kingdom, it hinders ; instead of saving souls, it corrupts and destroys. We pastors know too well that when our church-members are enticed within its walls they do not find there a recreation of body and soul for a more vigorous service of their Lord. Their spiritual garment is not always brought away ' unspotted by the flesh.' They have given their public sanction and pecuniary support to an institution whose doors open downward, and not upward toward a Christian home in the heavens. The average theatre is a gilded nastiness."

Dr. Herrick Johnson, of Chicago, quotes the New York *Evening Post*, which, in an article on "Our Stage As It Is," says: "There has probably been a greater mass of meretricious rubbish set on the New York stage during the last ten years than during the whole of its existence. We do not, of course, refer solely to pieces that appeal to the baser instincts, but to the whole body of sensational or emotional products—to the feverish slop of a French melodrama," etc.

In view of the truth which underlies all these strong puttings of the case, does not Wisdom say: BETTER NOT?

XI.

As for reforming the stage, how often has this been attempted! How signally has the attempt every time failed! The Rev. C. W. Winchester, in one of the best monographs on the theatre which we have read, says: "The facts are, (1) that the theatre in this city and country never had the support and encouragement of moral and religious people it now enjoys; (2) that the theatre here was never so bad. Clearly, if Christian patronage is going to reform the theatre the reform ought to begin. But the grade is downward. The theatre is growing worse and worse."

Dr. Wilkinson, in answer to the demand that Christian people must support and thus purify the stage, makes this mathematical argument: "Now, the Protestant Christians of New York number, by recent computation,

less than seventy-five thousand souls in a population of a million. Supposing a general agreement among them all that a regular attendance at the theatre was at this juncture the most pressing and most promising method of evangelic effort, they would not then constitute even one tenth of the numerical patronage which the management would study to please. Rather a slender minority to dictate the character of the representations."

Dr. Herrick Johnson (in a fierce assault upon the institution, for which he was bitterly denounced, and which assault he sustained by overwhelming proof) says : " The ideal stage is out of the question. It is out of the question just as pure, chaste, public human nudity is out of the question—that is, with men and women as they are now constituted. The nature of theatrical performances, the essential demands of the stage, the character of the plays and the constitution of human nature, make it impossible that the theatre should exist save under a law of degeneracy. Its

trend is downward ; its centuries of history tell just this one story. The actual stage of to-day—the stage as it now exists—is a moral abomination. In Chicago, at least, it is trampling on the Sabbath with defiant scoff. It is defiling our youth. It is making crowds familiar with the play of criminal passions. It is exhibiting woman with such approaches to nakedness as can have no other design than to breed lust behind the on-looking eyes. It is furnishing candidates for the brothel. It is getting us used to scenes that rival the voluptuous and licentious ages of the past. Go to Naples, and look on the gathered proofs of Pompeii's profligacy and lust, if you would see whither we are swiftly moving. It is a startling question asked by one of the theatrical play-writers of the times : ' To what extent will a continued progress in the same direction take us in the next twenty-five years ?' To what extent, indeed ! Good citizens, is it not full time we caught the alarm at these assaults on decency with which the very streets

are now placarded? Is it not full time for every respectable man and woman to withhold countenance from the unclean thing, and to enter indignant protest against its gross immoralities?"

We always think, under the storm of wrath which such sons of thunder in the evangelical pulpit let loose upon the theatre, of the few dramatic princes whose fame is comparatively unsullied and who are always quoted as "exceptions" by those who defend the institution. This fact is enough. They are "exceptions." The concession in the argument is demonstration. These few names uphold the theatre. Their influence is most dangerous.

On the whole, what of the tendency of the stage? You are trying as a Christian, not as a worldling, to decide what you ought to do. Look at it on all sides and then answer: What is the moral and religious influence of the institution? What of the actors themselves? What of the risk a young girl runs in becom-

ing an actress? What of the religious influence of habitual theatre-goers in any community? What of the idea given concerning a young man when it is said, "He is a great theatre-goer"? What does a man lose by refusing to patronize the institution? Will he be likely to be less firm in principle, less spiritual in tastes? And how do cultured and honored spiritually-minded people regard the stage? Notice, we do not say "cultured," but "cultured and spiritual people." Culture, as it is understood, is no standard by which to test moral and religious questions. Culture is often spiritually blind and intensely selfish. But what is the verdict of the spiritually minded and devout souls who sustain the Church? You all know the answer.

We acknowledge that the dramatic instinct is natural and legitimate, but we insist that the scenic accompaniments of the theatre are not necessary to the enjoyment of the dramatic gift. If the great "actors" would become great "readers" all the best results of the

stage as an educating agency would be secured and nine tenths of its evils would be avoided.

Why will not Henry Irving do daily as he did recently in London, of which the following report appeared in a London paper :

"Mr. Henry Irving gave, last evening, a reading of 'Hamlet,' on behalf of the Fund now being raised toward the extinction of the debt on the new Birkbeck Institution, the foundation stone of which was laid on April 23d, 1883, by the late Duke of Albany. Over a thousand people were assembled in the great hall, the majority of whom had booked their seats in advance. The platform was hung with crimson drapery, and ornamented with English and tropical foliage. . . . Mr. Irving, on appearing, met with such a reception that he was unable to make himself audible for some minutes. After a few brief introductory observations, in which he recounted the list of characters in the tragedy, he commenced his reading, or recitation. It is needless to follow him throughout a reading so

well known to, and so fully appreciated by, the general public, but it may be remarked that, without the aid of scenic accessories, he held his audience in rapt attention from the opening to the close. It was an elaborate and scholarly study, not only of the part of Hamlet, but of all the characters with which the leading figure is associated. The soliloquies were simply thinking aloud, in which the beauties of the poet were brought out with vivid distinctness. After the Closet scene in the third act, Mr. Irving said he did not think that the reading would have consumed so much time, therefore he would omit the fourth act. He then gave the Gravediggers' scene with much humor. In the closing scene he was specially effective, and, as he retired, he was hailed with a storm of applause, which he had to acknowledge by returning three times 'before the curtain.'"

Now although the Scriptures do not speak specifically, the institution of the theatre itself speaks; the popular verdict speaks; the wise

and devout men and women of the Church speak in council and pastoral and sermon, in conversation and in example. This body of testimony cannot be thrown into the air by the graceful toss of a pretty head, or be laughed into silence by a group of giddy girls and their giddy beaux.

The tendency of the theatre is, on the whole, exceedingly bad. This statement cannot be contradicted. Therefore, let who will patronize it, the motto of the consistent, earnest, unselfish Christian youth must be, "Better not." And we say seriously to young people who, although not Christians, really want to be—this is a good, safe rule for you touching the theatre: "Better not." The young people who refuse to support the stage are not weaklings, nor irrational. Indeed, they have a firm foundation for their practice, and all right-minded persons must respect them.

XII.

And there is the dance. What shall we say of it? As little girls dance by themselves, or as school-girls by themselves dance in the gymnasium; as old people dance with old people at a wedding feast or under the shadow of trees at a harvest home or picnic, what can one say against it? If no one danced but very young people or very old people, and if their use of the recreation were purely recreative, in broad daylight and in the open air and for a little time, it would be hard to find anything severely to condemn in it.

Against such dancing we should not care to write, innocent as it would be in the children and silly as it would be in the old. But the dance means more than these imply. It is not the rattle one hears in the neighborhood of a

rattlesnake that he objects to. A child might play with it.

The dance is the rattle, but the danger is in the fang and the poison. The dance cannot be considered abstractly. It is a usage of Society. Its associations and tendencies must come into the count. And one must not discriminate too critically nor carry his experiments too far where there lurks a real danger. The rattle may please a child, but, grasping the rattle, he may receive a deadly sting. Now, in the dance there must be at some point a peril, or such a man as Bishop Coxe, of Western New York, would not say officially to the clergy and laity of his diocese: "The gross, debasing waltz would not be tolerated for another year if Christian mothers in our communion would only set their faces against it, and remove our daughters from its contaminations, and their sons from that contempt of womanhood and womanly modesty which it begets. Alas! that women professing to follow Christ and godliness should not rally

for the honor of their sex and drive these shameless dances from society."

And why should such a large-minded man as Horace Bushnell speak of certain forms of the dance as "contrived possibilities of license which belong to high society only when it runs low"? And why should one of the most fair-minded and earnest New England Congregational pastors say: "Fashionable dances as now carried on are revolting to every feeling of delicacy and propriety, and are fraught with the greatest danger to millions"? There must be more than sparkling eyes and lively rattle and shining skin in the bushes yonder! Keep that child away!

A Protestant minister of large experience and influence says that "the round dance of fashionable society cannot be participated in in the heat and glare of the ball-room, with the accessories of music and motion, with the close physical contact and the hot breaths on each other's cheek, without intoxicating the brain and setting the passion of the partici-

pants on fire. It is physiologically impossible —deny it who will! Any intelligent and honest physician will tell you so. I do not say that the participants know or are always conscious of the secret cause of their pleasurable excitement; but the fact remains the same. For these reasons and more I maintain that the modern dance is undermining the safeguards of modesty and virtue."

One cannot wonder, if these statements and reasonings be correct, that Gail Hamilton with such vehemence proclaims concerning the dance that "the thing in its very nature is unclean and cannot be washed. The very *pose* of the parties suggests impurity." And we cannot dismiss this most disagreeable subject without giving the philosophy of a wise man who thinks clearly and writes forcibly. He says: "It is no accident that the dance is what it is. It mingles the sexes in such closeness of personal approach and contact as, outside of the dance, is nowhere tolerated in respectable society. It does this under a com-

plexity of circumstances that conspire to heighten the impropriety of it. It is evening, and the hour is late ; there is the delicious and unconscious intoxication of music and motion in the blood ; there is the strange, confusing sense of being individually unobserved among so many, while yet the natural ' noble shame ' which guards the purity of man and woman alone together is absent—such is the occasion, and still, hour after hour, the dance whirls its giddy kaleidoscope around, bringing hearts so near that they almost beat against each other, mixing the warm, mutual breaths, darting the fine personal electricity across between the meeting fingers, flushing the face and lighting the eyes with a quick language, subject often to gross interpretations on the part of the vile-hearted—why, this fashionable institution seems to me to have been invented in an unfriendly quarter, usually conceived of as situated under us, to give our human passions leave to disport themselves, unreproved by conscience, by reason, or by shame, almost at

their will. I will not trust myself to speak of this further. My indignation waxes hotter than can well be controlled. I even seem to myself to have contracted some soil from having merely described truthfully what thousands of fellow-Christians, ignorant of themselves, practice without swallowing a qualm !"

XIII.

TERRIBLE! Yes, dear young reader, we know it is terrible. We write and quote with sorrow. But we do it to show, not our personal opinions, but to show what certain good people and certain philosophers and men of high and responsible position think about a "little," "simple," "fashionable" custom which you and some of your friends may approve and perhaps practice. Over against your thought we put other thought. We do it to incite further thought. It is possible that some of this is too strongly stated. We do not endorse fully the violence of expression which we have quoted, but, after all, must there not be fire enough under this smoke to justify us in keeping the powder away? After all, if such worthy and experienced people, who know the world so well, are fully persuaded

of the evil of the dance, are you entirely wise in your defence of it, or in your assertion that "there is no harm in it"?

"Of course," you say, "we do not approve of the public ball." Certainly not; and yet we do find that people who defend the dance and those who indulge in it in private make "exceptions" in the case of "college promenades," or of "receptions" given to "the dancing-master and his sweet little French wife," or of the regular "dancing-school," where, "of course, you dance with the other pupils," or of parties given by some prominent citizen and "attended by people we all know, you know." Alas! how easy it is to do what we want to do and then to defend it!

You are ready to say that "if people don't dance they will have *some* games—perhaps the 'kissing games' of a cheap and coarse society; which is the worse, the dance or the kissing-forfeits?" Do you really ask that question in earnest, young friend? Don't you

very well know that the people who intelligently discountenance the dance are equally ready to denounce the games you have indicated?

What was it you said about "recreation"? Who most need recreation? The very people who spend the most time in the dissipations of Society. They call their indulgence "recreation." The physician sent to see them and to make prescription, smiles as they say it. They, people who *need* recreation, are the people who never resort to the dance to find it. Indeed, one would be afraid to recommend the dance to them lest they answer as Thackeray did: "When a man confesses himself fond of dancing I set him down as a fool;" or as Daniel Webster, when he was asked why he did not dance, replied, "I have not brains enough." But then we must not expect everybody to have the taste and sense of Thackeray and Webster.

XIV.

We have now laid down what we believe are the principles by which wise and spiritually-minded people should be governed in personal practice and in administrative action in this matter of social amusements. We do not think that there is any half-way ground. The law of safety is total abstinence. This in reference to wine, the drama, the dance, and the card-table. The four institutions stand with the dark background of the history they have recorded. Conceding that you may to an extent patronize all and be safe yourself, the support you give and the example you set will be very likely to imperil others. What would Jesus Christ have done concerning an example which might imperil others?

Yes, there is some "good" in most of these indulgencies—always giving a loose interpre-

tation to the word "good." They give good cheer in Society. They make time pass in a bright and jolly way. They make some people very attractive. They give a certain air of being at-home-in-the-world which young people covet and which has its advantages. The drama gives a degree of taste and culture, especially in the realm æsthetic, and there are refined pleasures which some temperaments can experience without apparent personal injury. But even such good things may be too dearly bought. When Henry Irving has said his strongest word in defence of the drama we can only say, "Yes, but the best you sell must be bought at the expense of something better." Better be without polish of a given kind if in getting it one has hurt when he should have blessed.

Amusements may be safe under two conditions :

1. That there is no hereditary tendency to be warmed by indulgence into a dangerous life.

2. That there are perfect home safeguards against the possible evil. But what about one's influence where there are or are likely to be an hereditary taint and a lack of home protection? Is it Christ-like to create a popular requirement and a popular fondness for what endangers so many unprotected lives? Would it not be nobler to sacrifice self-gratification to others' conviction rather than ask or tempt them to sacrifice conviction to our self-gratification? Is it entirely in harmony with the law of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to use your advantage or your freedom to the injury of people less favored or less free? We have not so learned Christ.

We know what Society says. And we must oppose Society. What right has Society to say what Christian people should do? Take the so-called Society of this world. What are its objects? The good of the race? The promotion of character, of self-control, of high ideals of purity and conduct? Certainly not. The key-note of Society is—self-grati-

fication. The radical element in it is—pleasure. Preference has full swing. Conscience and its protests are silenced by popular verdicts, by usage, by the exuberant life of the crowd bent on fun and frolic. What gratifies the palate, the sense of beauty, the love of admiration and of conquest, is favored and defended in Society. The world and the flesh riot in Society ; extravagance and immodesty in dress ; hypocrisy in conversation ; affectation in deportment ; rivalries, petty jealousies, and dishonesties. The poor are rejected, the rich courted, and simplicity ridiculed. Shall such Society dictate to Christian people what they shall do and allow ? And shall its sneer at modesty, good taste, true culture, and Christian conscientiousness have weight with followers of the hero and saint of Nazareth ?

Man is a social being, but it is as a rational being that he is social. Unless the gratification of this element in man tends to intelligence, grace, and character, solitude were better. In this way you may test Society : Does

it promote the higher elements of character? Peacocks may strut about, flaunting their colors in the sunshine; swine may eat and eat and drink and drink, filling their filthy stomachs and sating their vulgar appetites; monkeys may play their tricks on each other and grin over their success at a comrade's expense (a pack of cards would only increase the success of their cunning); terriers may leap and dance, stand on their hind legs, jump over sticks and embrace each other in the unwearying frolic and "have a good time."

But do peacocks, swine, monkeys, and pet dogs constitute Society for rational beings? And shall their human representatives—to greater or less degree, with or without the refinements of the times—dictate the conditions of social recognition to scholars, to women of purity, to dignified matrons, to believers in the majesty of the soul, the love of God, the splendid aims of science, literature and art, and to the saints who seek God's image and desire the fellowship of royal souls in the

kingdom everlasting? Young friends, let Society go its low ways of selfish pleasure. It is unworthy of you. It holds nothing worth your search or desire. Resent its dictation, in the spirit of noble manhood and womanhood.

"No Society at all, then?" Well, no *such* Society. Far better never go into Society. But is there no rational Society? If not, why not institute such in your village, neighborhood, or circle of acquaintances, at once? Why not organize a society that befits the Christian conception; as far above the other in all high and honorable things as the dome of St. Peter's is above the fever-breeding marshes of the Campagna, or the halls of painting in the Pitti gallery above the billiard and smoking-room of a Florentine albergo; a society that extols the enjoyment of intelligent conversation, music, and art studies; that meets for mutual improvement; that finds rest and recreation in rational activity; that violates no law of physical health; that fosters no animal passions or propensities; that im-

perils no young life by exciting latent energies of evil, but that points upward toward the clear heaven of ideal, honorable, and useful character.

Our good Dr. Wilkinson has wisely answered the sophistical statement that "it is better to dance than to slander your neighbors." He says: "True, but so perhaps it is better to steal than to commit murder. But those who refrain from stealing are not therefore obliged to commit murder. And those who refrain from dancing are not obliged to slander their neighbors. There is conversation which neither abuses the absent nor yet injures the participants in it. But the art of such conversation is indeed far gone toward being lost to a generation that will frisk like Donatello, and fly into the dance, to dodge a fair and friendly encounter of mind with mind."

Let us, dear young readers, establish the beginning, at least, of a society that is not afraid of "a fair and friendly encounter of mind with mind."

XV.

We must warn young Christians who agree with us, and who do not indulge in the objectionable things we have condemned, against one evil to which on their side they are exposed. Do not imagine yourselves "good" or "saintly" because you deliberately deny yourselves those earthly alliances and gratifications. It is wise and right, as we see it, and as the Church sees it, for you to make the choice you have. But there is no merit in it. Perhaps, indeed, a very deceptive form of "self" may be in it. Some people do not go into "Society" because they lack the qualities which would make them a success in society. They may not have the social position which exposes them to temptation. Let us watch motives and not congratulate ourselves

too warmly. Let us try to get our motives pure.

But with best motives, and with positive self-denial in the case, still be humble while you are prudent. Avoid evil, but avoid the greater evil of self-righteousness. Do not look down with the spirit of self-importance upon young friends who have not taken your view of the subject. Of all things which are offensive in God's sight, nothing can be worse than self-righteousness. Do right, as God gives you to see the right, and be grateful for His gift of light, but do not boast yourselves on grace. When self-righteousness comes in, God's grace goes out. This is the law of the kingdom. The sweet scent of the violet vanishes at the peeling and cutting of leeks and onions. Take a brave stand humbly. Leave the decisions and judgments of others to themselves and to God. Seek strength to live out your own convictions in all wisdom, humility, and gentleness.

XVI.

To parents this word: With you lies the burden of responsibility. If you are unwise, or apathetic, or weak, the voice of the Church can have little authority. You mould character from the beginning. You can repress and counteract the tendencies which so early develop that you alone are able to discover them and apply corrective treatment. To you the Church must look.

No, you need not fear to "prejudice your children," as you call it, "against religion by over-strictness." If in kindness, consistency, and fidelity you show them your reasons for disapproving of these social customs; if you convince them of your unselfish love; if you gratify them generously in legitimate lines of recreation and enjoyment; if you cultivate in them love for God and a taste for divine

things, you will never prejudice them against you or the Church. But should indulgence in these lines prove their ruin, better far that over your grave they should exonerate you from all complicity in their fall than that, standing there, they should curse the weakness and unwisdom that left them to themselves and to their own immature judgment.

Leader of Society, we have a word for you. For your own gratification—mere personal gratification—you persist in imposing upon young people customs which their parents oppose, which their ministers oppose, which their consciences at the best oppose ; customs in which there is positively no benefit ; customs which weaken the conscience and prejudice those who practise them, against the Church, and which are full of possible peril —physical, social, moral, and religious. You may succeed in lulling conscience in these young lives, but you also beget a spirit of contempt for the parents, the pastors, and the Church which developed the conscientiousness

you have suppressed. You give no tonic to moral character to neutralize the effects of that baleful yielding to popularity and fashion and society which you induce. You virtually set children against their parents and against their Church. You open paths to temptation. Terrible is the risk you run—and cause others to run—solely for the sake of fashion and of self-indulgence.

Laxity in the Church in reference to these matters is no new thing. A gentleman in New Haven some time ago stated in a church meeting the fact that a salutary change had come over the Church in respect to amusements ; that once they were condemned, but that now "the formal and external difference in life is less between Christian and non-Christian than it was then ;" that dancing, playing cards, the opera, the circus, the theatre, are now patronized by Christian people. And he added, "I see nothing to regret in this change."

To this defence of the dance, the theatre,

and the card-table the editor of the secular daily paper in which it appeared replied: "These things are not now to be tried for the first time. The experience of the Church is rich and full of instruction on this subject. Two or three generations ago the principal churches in Boston were almost without a creed; certainly imposed none upon applicants for admission; held the broadest and loosest theological opinions; hardly sustained a prayer-meeting among them, and indulged without restraint in the amusements of the world. Were they strong, large, vigorous churches? On the contrary, they were small and feeble. When Lyman Beecher went there and began to preach a theology that had some backbone in it, and established a live prayer-meeting, and stiffened up the conditions of admission to the Church, and laid worldliness under the ban, not only did his church spring into life and power, and increase rapidly, but all the other churches, in self-defence, to keep themselves from being entirely emp-

tied, were obliged to ring their bells for evening meetings and follow in the wake of the reformer. Two centuries ago the members and even the parsons of the English Church were universally given to dancing, theatre-going, horse-racing, card-playing, gambling, fox-hunting, wine-drinking, etc. Will any one select that period as one of prosperity, to say nothing of spirituality, in the English Church? What was it that gave the early Methodism its prodigious growth and vitality? Has Spurgeon's church become what it is through waltzing? The teaching of history is that the Church grows in size, influence, and vitality when she preaches positively a strong theology, maintaining earnest prayer-meetings, and keeps herself separate from the world; and that just in proportion as it is made easy for the world to come into it the world does not care to come. There is an ominous significance in the fact that distaste for prayer-meetings, irregularity in attendance upon public worship, lack of interest in Church

and missionary work, unwillingness to engage in the work of persuading men to become Christians, or in any kind of spiritual activity, usually go together, and are found in connection with theatre-going, dancing, and worldly amusements. We do not believe that the way to make the Church grow is to bring down its standards to the level of the world's theological belief and pleasure and practice."

With these wise words from a common-sense man of this busy world of affairs we dismiss the whole question, commending it to the wise and devout consideration of old and young, who desire to become like Jesus Christ in aim, in spirit, in word and deed, and to serve Humanity as He served it, by charity, by loftiness of purpose, by dignity of deportment, and by supreme unselfishness.

DATE DUE

GAYLORD

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709
For renewals call (510) 649-2500

All items are subject to recall.